

1916 – 2003

Gregory Peck

Empire remembers the actor who was a great man before he was a great star

When Gregory Peck died on June 12 at the age of 87, it was as if a magnificent, much-loved building had been demolished. A part of the American movie landscape since the early '40s, you could no more imagine Hollywood without him than you could imagine it without the Hollywood sign.

Born Eldred Gregory Peck on April 5 1916 in La Jolla, California, the man producer Darryl Zanuck described as having "a Biblical face" conquered Broadway before making his feature debut in 1944's *Days Of Glory*. His second film, *The Keys Of The Kingdom*, earned him the first of five Oscar nominations. Just four movies into his career, he was working with Alfred Hitchcock on *Spellbound*.

During the next two decades, there was no bigger star in Hollywood than Gregory Peck. His filmography reads like an A-Z of classic movies. *Cape Fear*, *Duel In The Sun*, *The Gunfighter*, *The Guns Of Navarone*, *The Man In The Gray Flannel Suit*, *Roman Holiday*, *Twelve O'Clock High* – no part or genre was beyond Peck. He won his sole Best Actor Oscar for his performance in *To Kill A Mockingbird* as lawyer Atticus Finch, named the favourite all-time movie hero by the AFI the week before the actor passed away.

Gregory Peck's wasn't a charmed life – his parents split up when he was five, his eldest son committed suicide, and his first marriage ended in divorce. However, his misfortune made him compassionate rather than bitter. While his generosity led him to insist that he and Audrey Hepburn share billing on *Roman Holiday* as he was convinced her performance would earn her an Oscar (it did), his humanitarian work varied from serving as the chairman of the Motion Picture Relief Fund to working as the public face of Chrysler for free to help secure 600,000 jobs. Not that he thought such endeavours were particularly remarkable. "I'm not a do-gooder," he said when he was awarded the Jean Hersholt humanitarian award in 1968. "I simply take part in activities that I believe in."

Gregory Peck rarely acted during the last 20 years of his life, preferring to concentrate on his charity work and indulge his love of race horses – an idyllic retirement for a genuine screen idol. His passing not only signals the end of a rich, noble life but the close of an era.

May you have love and raiment,
And a soft pillow for your head,
And may you spend 40 years in Heaven,
Before the Devil knows you're dead.

GREGORY PECK – ACTOR, POET, LEGEND.